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NEED FOR ENHANCING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS AMONG STUDENT TEACHERS STUDYING IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION: A PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Education is a field where knowledge passes through all walks of life from person to person with varying degrees. It helps an individual to move towards the goal set and it may be said that people reach their goal by following clear cut paths. It also forms basis for civilization and cultural behavior of the society.According to the education commission (1964-66) "Investment in teacher education can yield very rich dividends because the financial resources required are small when marked against the resulting improvements in the education of millions". Teacher education emphasizes the development of specific knowledge, attitude, skills and behavior patterns which an individual requires to perform this job adequately. So this education programme should aim to develop those skills which are needed for a professional teacher.

Introduction

Thinking skills are one of the most important yet inadequately implemented areas, of the curriculum. Thinking skills are relatively specific cognitive operations that can be considered the building blocks of thinking. Certainly, a part of helping students to develop and improve their thinking skills is connected in some significant way with the challenge and discovery. However , it is often the case that works in a given situation may not work at all in another situation. The variables related to thinking skills are themselves quite formidable. Assisting students to improve thinking skills is increasingly recognized as a primary goal of education. Skills can be conceptualized on a continuum based on the level of complexity required or the difficulty of the problem to be addressed. The broad term" cognitive processes" refers to complex operations that usually require substantial time and effort and the integration of general and specific knowledge.

Being a skilful thinker in this new millennium is of a paramount importance. A glance at the developments of information technology and the knowledge explosion phenomenon would quickly convince us to the need to be a skillful thinker. One can find the information known under the sun by means of internet with few key strokes on personal computers. Upon finding the pool of information however, it is the learner responsibility and challenge to differentiate between information nuggets and information

garbage. Therefore the important task of educators is to instill these invaluable thinking skills into students so that they are equipped to stay competitive in this challenging and rapidly changing world.

To mention a few who have worked in this cognitive area are Edward de bano, Guilford, Torrance, etc. In addition to teaching the prescribed syllabus the activities involving critical thinking should be encouraged. For this a free and fear less environment should be provided. Planning and structured activities help for developing better thinking and reasoning ability. Reasoning and critical thinking concern the analysis and evaluation of arguments, where "arguments" refers to the process of proving that one idea is true by appealing to another set of ideas as evidence. Reasoning and critical thinking are commonly understood as one aspect of the field of logic when considered broadly.

Many educators assume that students learn how to think while processing information that they are trying to learn. However, lessons that keeps the focus on subject matter, obscure the nature of the thinking processes involved in manipulating the information that students fail to learn to understand these processes .(Bayer,1987).

Helping students learn how to control and direct their own thinking and developing the disposition that support and motivate thinking are essential aspects of the teaching of thinking. Without engaging in Meta cognition and dispositions that drive skilful thinking, individuals are not inclined to the full potential the thinking skills learned. Without such conscious control of their own thinking, they cannot transfer the thinking skills learned from one setting to another. Valuing the use of credible sources other points of view and search for alternatives motivate thinking and enhance its effectiveness.

Why should we be concerned about students' adaptness in critical thinking in the classrooms? Obviously we want to educate our students whose decisions and choices will be based upon a multitude of creative ideas that span across a wide range of school of thought. Maintaining a high level of productivity in today's modern society requires one to be critical in generating ideas as well as capability in utilizing a number of different styles of thinking.

Raymond. S. Nickerson (1985) an authority on critical thinking has given the characteristics of a thinker such as 1. Uses evidence skillfully and impartially. 2. Organizes thoughts and articulates them concisely and coherently. 3. Distinguishes between logically valid and invalid inferences. 4. Sees similarities and analogies which are not apparent.

According to Guilford Thinking is of two types convergent and divergent. Convergent thinking implies the rigid approach to an issue or conforming the traditional way of thinking. On the contrary divergent thinking is departure from the beaten track and is unusual way of thinking. It stimulates a questioning frame of mind and is open to listening to a variety of approaches.
Cohen suggests at least four different complex thinking process. They are problem solving, decision making, critical thinking and creative thinking. These are considered to be the most essential thinking skills.

Students logical and critical thinking abilities have been of interest to scholars who study self–directed learning (Garrison 1997). Self directed learning occurs when students make informed decisions regarding each part of the learning process including what to learn, why to learn it, how to learn it and how to assess the validity and value of the learning. Garrison discussed the important arguing that insight and intuition are part of critical and self directed learning arguing that insight and intuition are part of critical thinking which is needed for self directed learning to take place. This idea is shared also by Brookfield (1997) who considers the ability to envision alternatives a key feature of creativity to be an essential component of critical thinking.

Critical thinking is reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do. Critical thinking uses

basic thinking processes to analyze arguments and generate insight into particular meaning and interpretations: develop cohesive, logical reasoning patterns and understand assumptions a biases underlying particular positions: attain a credible, concise and convincing style of presentation.

There are many definitions of critical thinking. Richard Paul (1988, 49) calls it the ability to reach sound conclusions based on observation and information. Barry Beyer (1983) describes it as assessing the authencity, accuracy and worth of knowledge claims, beliefs, or arguments. Stephen Norris (1985, 40-45) says it helps students to apply everything they already know and feel, to evaluate their own thinking, especially to change their behaviour.

One of the main reasons why we lack critical thinking is learner's lack of deep understanding of the topic they study. Many students are unable to give evidence which requires more than mere superficial understanding of the concepts, and are unable to apply knowledge they have acquired to real world problems. This is due to superficial teaching methods that fail to engage students in thinking deeply and critically about the topics they are studying and teacher inability to exercise and promote higher- order thinking skills.

Teaching methods in recent times have been moved from predominantly teacher oriented and teacher controlled approach to pupil interactive system. Such a system requires a number of changes in the instructional procedure and the material used for effective teaching. In formal education system the use of interactive multimedia is very useful for the class room teaching.

Technology is changing the way faculty teaching and students learning. At technological advances are introduced into the formal system of education, are more and more attracted by the promise and potential of technology for enhancing access and learning. We need to understand what technology can and cannot do. It is the critical complement to the educational experience, opening more opportunities for the learner. Apart using various strategies of teaching such as co-operative learning, inquiry method etc can bring change in the thinking of the students.

Conclusion

Teachers' ability to exercise and promote higher order thinking will impact student's ability to develop these thinking skills and abilities themselves.

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